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ABSTRACT

The program described in this paper was based upon the premise that the activity of cooking in the classroom is an excellent way of integrating all areas of learning and a very useful reading vehicle. Through cooking activities and related field trips, children can add to both their knowledge in basic subject areas and their motor skills as well as art, writing, and reading skills. Kindergarten children read two-dimensional recipes, first graders read large-scale recipes (similar to language-experience charts), and children in second grade and above use cookbooks on an individual reading basis. (JM)

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HOW IT ORIGINATED: With the advent of the Open Classroom in America, greater emphasis was placed on learning through experience and action. Many teachers have attempted to open up classrooms and set up experimental centers, but were hampered by a paucity of materials. In the area of cooking, in particular, very little material was available that combined recipes and procedures that were directly related to learning activities.

Through the years the authors had cooked with children in the home, at school and at scouting activities. It had been observed that many concepts could be developed through such activities. The authors felt that an effective means of helping children to organize their experiences and thinking was through cooking.

Many of the teachers in our school, Pocantico Hills School, saw cooking as an enjoyable extra, but they were not really cognizant of the extent to which it could play an intrinsic part in the curriculum.

Many of the teachers did not enjoy cooking themselves or understand how easily it could be used within the classroom. Nor were they experienced in setting up a cooking program which involved child participation. Furthermore, throughout their experience the authors had found that the recipes available were frequently inappropriate to the abilities and tastes of children. Therefore, the authors felt that a very special cookbook would be of service to the teachers and children of Pocantico Hills School.

This program was based upon the premise that the activity of cooking in the classroom is of educational worth. The outcome of the accompanying study was a cookbook based upon experience and research in the literature rather than a quasi-experimental study with controls. While this cookbook related to

curriculum, it can not be pretended that it included all the possible range of activities that can precede and stem from the actual cooking experiences. It is hoped that as the teachers used this guide to learning activities, they have discovered further implications that will aid in the education of children.

WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT: Although cooking in the classroom is associated with the open classroom, it is basically an important tool that all teachers can utilize. It is an excellent way of integrating all areas of learning.

The process of the cooking is the vital element in the activity rather than the finished product. Children will enjoy eating what they have made even if it isn't perfect. The important element in the cooking activity is the reading, the discussing, the doing and the understanding.

According to Piaget: "action is only instructive when it involves the concrete and spontaneous participation of the child himself--necessary that learners have at their disposal concrete material experiences--that they form their own hypothesis and verify (or not verify) them." (2)

In the early years children learn that foods change through cooking. A great deal of discussion can be generated in this area. They can also discuss origins and health elements of the foods, and notice the colors and shapes of various foodstuffs. There is much sensory input in cooking with the smelling of the spices, the tasting of the foods and the feeling of the mixtures. Eye-hand coordination and motor development are practiced through the activities of grating, cutting, peeling, sifting, stirring, chopping and squeezing.

Through cooking children can grasp the idea that foods are seasonal. Certain crops grow at certain times, and the idea of the harvest becomes more meaningful.

The many holidays bring into use particular foods that have become traditional for particular times of the year and with particular ethnic groups.

The study of geography and climate and its effect on the kinds of food people eat can also be raised. Through cooking children become aware not only of the differences in countries but also differences in regions of the United States. The foods that are peculiar to the South are different from those of the East, North or West. To explore these differences would entail social studies, literature and science. Because of the cooking project the children can also understand the evolution of methods of growing and preserving food from the rather primitive methods of the American Indian to our modern technology in both growing, preserving and distributing food.

As the children progress, the recipes become a little more complicated and build upon the skills already developed. At this time cooking can be incorporated into field trip experiences such as a visit to a nature center and cooking wild foods found there, a visit to a maple sap operation and the tapping of trees themselves, a visit to an early American restoration and the grinding of cornmeal which can be purchased and later used in the classroom. The bakery provides an opportunity for children to see how bread and cake products are made in large quantities and distributed for sale. A visit to a Carvel plant provides the opportunity to explore the ingredients and safety procedures involved in making, distributing, and storing ice cream. A trip to the Statue of Liberty or the United Nations gives the children the insight into the immigrant origins of America and how people from all over the world visit and live here bringing with them their own particular food preferences. Various ethnic recipes are included to give the children a feel for other children and lifestyles.

Art can be incorporated through the child's writing and decorating their own

recipes, decorating the cooking center, making food attractive, illustrating cookbooks, decorating cookies and cakes, and arranging an attractive table. Various food used could be arranged as a model for a still life painting before actually being cooked. There are many famous paintings by great artists which depict people engaged in cooking and farming which children can explore.

Throughout the cooking experience children are verbally communicating freely and naturally since it is the kind of an activity which encourages discussion. The brightest student in the class will not necessarily be the best at cooking. Each child has an opportunity to add his contribution and experience success!

There is very little room for failure or competition in this kind of classroom activity. This opportunity for group experience is valuable in the socialization of children. There are many cooking related activities which allow for this interaction.

Children can see the scientific changes that take place through heating and chilling, through the actions of yeast, the rising properties of salt, baking powder and baking soda. Even though the children are not familiar with the technological terms, as the years progress they become aware of the processes. When they come across such terms as fermentation, osmosis, lactic acid, chemical reactions, and enzyme action they will remember their experiences making yeast breads, peeling carrots, making yogurt, baking cakes or making junket. As another science activity the children could grow herbs in the classroom and use them in their recipes.

What better way to learn mathematics than through cooking! The children can count numbers of children and numbers of servings needed. They can increase and decrease recipes, make up shopping lists, measure ingredients and compare amounts! This is an excellent place for them to learn classification of fruits, vegetables, dry ingredients, wet ingredients, hard and soft ingredients.

Piaget tells us: "--logic is not inborn but develops little by little--" (1) Older children might want to set up a store and sell some of the things that they make. The cost of a recipe can be figured out and a profit made if the children decide to do this. This involves making change and dealing with money. Of course, cooking also reinforces the importance of telling time accurately and is a very useful tool in teaching time to very young students. This includes understanding numbers of minutes required to prepare the product, i.e. how long to bake a cake or chill a pudding.

In the area of health and nutrition the children will learn about the four basic food groups, about vitamins, balanced meals and making and executing a menu. Breakfasts or luncheons are often activities which take place in the classroom with the children planning the menu and then preparing the food. Some health and natural foods have been incorporated into this cookbook and we've tried to cut down on the use of sugar. The teacher can emphasize that snacks can become wholesome and nutritious rather than empty calories. Through these health foods children will learn to enjoy foods that were not previously in their diets.

Last but not least, cooking is a reading vehicle par excellence! Kindergarten children read two-dimensional recipes, while first graders read large-scale recipes that are first cousins to language-experience charts. Starting in second grade, children use cookbooks on an individualized reading basis. That is, each child studies the array of cookbooks contained in the recipe section of the classroom library and makes his particular choice. He is hereby launched on his dual career of individualized reading and cooking and is further enabled to partake of the highly individualized pleasure of eating.

Recognition of sequence and careful reading of the recipe helps develop better

reading skills in children. Mythology abounds with stories that deal with changes in season and which might be incorporated into this learning experience through reading. Many recipes have interesting anecdotes that can be read to a class, concerning the origin of the name of a recipe. Some examples are Irish Soda Bread, Rhode Island Johnny Cakes and Sourdough Bread. Additionally, children can make up and write their own recipes, they can write reports about the countries and origins of the recipes and of the origins of the raw foods. Plays can be performed about the countries.

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